

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Holy Thursday—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Holy Thursday - Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

Reading I

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,
“This month shall stand at the head of your calendar;
you shall reckon it the first month of the year.
Tell the whole community of Israel:
On the tenth of this month every one of your families
must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household.
If a family is too small for a whole lamb,
it shall join the nearest household in procuring one
and shall share in the lamb
in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it.
The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish.
You may take it from either the sheep or the goats.
You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month,
and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present,
it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight.
They shall take some of its blood
and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel
of every house in which they partake of the lamb.
That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh
with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

“This is how you are to eat it:
with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand,
you shall eat like those who are in flight.
It is the Passover of the LORD.
For on this same night I will go through Egypt,
striking down every firstborn of the land, both man and beast,
and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt—I, the LORD!
But the blood will mark the houses where you are.
Seeing the blood, I will pass over you;
thus, when I strike the land of Egypt,
no destructive blow will come upon you.

“This day shall be a memorial feast for you,
which all your generations shall celebrate
with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution.”

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18.

R. (cf. 1 Cor 10:16) Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

How shall I make a return to the LORD
for all the good he has done for me?
The cup of salvation I will take up,
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

R. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

Precious in the eyes of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.
I am your servant, the son of your handmaid;
you have loosed my bonds.

R. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.
My vows to the LORD I will pay
in the presence of all his people.

R. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

Reading II

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Brothers and sisters:

I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,
that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over,
took bread, and, after he had given thanks,
broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying,
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

Verse Before the Gospel

John 13:34

I give you a new commandment, says the Lord:
love one another as I have loved you.

Gospel

John 13:1-15

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father.
He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.
The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over.
So, during supper,
fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God,
he rose from supper and took off his outer garments.
He took a towel and tied it around his waist.
Then he poured water into a basin
and began to wash the disciples' feet
and dry them with the towel around his waist.
He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,
"Master, are you going to wash my feet?"
Jesus answered and said to him,
"What I am doing, you do not understand now,
but you will understand later."
Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet."
Jesus answered him,
"Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me."
Simon Peter said to him,
"Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well."
Jesus said to him,
"Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed,
for he is clean all over;
so you are clean, but not all."
For he knew who would betray him;
for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

So when he had washed their feet
and put his garments back on and reclined at table again,
he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you?
You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am.
If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet,
you ought to wash one another's feet.
I have given you a model to follow,
so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

Exegesis

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

Our scripture passage from the Book of Exodus describes the evening of the first Passover. The Passover occurs with God unleashing the tenth plague on the Egyptians. The tenth plague was the killing of the first-born child of each family including animals. God will pass over those homes that are marked with the blood of the lamb. The event began at twilight on the 14th of Nisan, the first month on the Jewish lunar calendar. The night of the 14th into the 15th was the night of the full moon. In the third century the Roman Catholic Church broke from strict adherence to the Jewish calendar and dates Easter Sunday on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the March 21st Spring Equinox. The Gregorian calendar of course is solar, and the Hebrew calendar is lunar. In any event we know when the original Passover event occurred, and we know that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. Because we know that Jesus died on a Friday and that He rose from the dead on Sunday, the Church broke away from strict adherence to the Jewish lunar calendar, and dates Easter as described above.

The blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the doorpost using hyssop branches. From the Cross after Jesus said, "I thirst," "There was a vessel filled with common wine. So, they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to His mouth." (Jn 19:29) Jesus is the Pascal Lamb and the blood on the Cross is the blood on the doorpost. The Pascal Mystery is the New Passover.

It is important to note the Jewish understanding of memorial or remembrance. It is much deeper than the English understanding, much is lost in translation. The underlying word is *anamnesis*. It means to make present again what once was, to reenact or the re-live. They dress as if in flight as they were during the original event, with walking stick in hand. Today as the celebration begins, the youngest male child asks the question, "Father, how is this night different from any other night?" The celebration that follows makes present again that first Passover so that those who were not there could now experience it.

As celebrated today the first two days of Passover make present again the first night of the tenth plague and the sacrifice of the lamb, the last two days of the eight-day celebration reenact the passage through the Red Sea. We Catholics begin our Triduum with the original Passover reading and recall the Red Sea deliverance during the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil.

Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18.

The response verse is taken from 1 Corinthians 10:16, "Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ." At the Last Supper as Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist He talked about the gift of His indwelling presence. When we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus into our own bodies we are entering into a common union with Christ. Divine life is entering into our human life. It is a common union with God and with all who worthily share in the one bread and the one cup.

Psalm 116 is an individual psalm of thanksgiving. It is a response to the goodness of God. The psalmist promises to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving in response to God grace. At the Last Supper Jesus took the bread and the chalice and He gave thanks to God, *eucharistine*. The word *eucharistine* comes from two Greek words *eu* and *charis* which mean good and gift respectively. So, the word *eucharistine* means to give thanks for the good gift. There is no greater gift than the gift of divine life in the Eucharist.

Exegesis (Continued)

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Our scripture passage today is taken from a larger narrative where St. Paul is addressing the Church at Corinth concerning some abuses that he was made aware of relative to the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Roman and Greek culture of the time was heavily emersed in social class differentiation. It was culturally expected to offer special treatment and respect to the elite and the upper class. In the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in Corinth the elite were being offered preferential treatment.

St. Paul begins by reminding the people that his authority was handed on to him directly from the Lord Himself. Jesus allowed Himself to be handed over to the Cross. This ultimate act of humility should humble each one of us. To put on the heart and mind of Christ is to recognize everyone as more important than ourselves.

St. Paul recalls the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. By the power of the words of the Word made flesh the bread becomes His Body and the wine becomes His Blood. The Greek word for remembrance is again *anamnesis*, which means to make present again what once was. The point that St. Paul is making is that if we are at the Last Supper with Jesus, there is no room to mistreat anyone who is lower in social stature. The elite should get on their hands and knees and wash the feet of the lowly and down trod; not exclude them.

John 13:1-15

The beginning of Chapter 13 of John's Gospel is the hinge between the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory. The Book of Glory begins with the Last Supper. It begins with Jesus getting on His hands and knees and washing the feet of His disciples, the lowliest servant's task. In this is the glory of God.

The entire focus of John's Gospel has been on the Hour which has now arrived. The Hour is the totality of the Paschal Mystery. It is the Passion, the Crucifixion and Death, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of Jesus. The Hour is the time of Christ's passage to the Father.

John emphasizes the fact that Jesus is always in control. He is aware of where He is in His Father's plan and what lies before Him. He willingly choses the path of His own Passion. Out of love He reminds the disciples and us that He came to serve and to give His life for us.

The washing of the feet was the task of the lowliest servant of the household. It was a task performed as the guests entered the house. All the attention has been given to the fact that Jesus the Son of God humbles Himself to wash His disciple's feet. I think that when He does this is also significant. He did not wash their feet as they arrived. We are told that He got up from the table. This is the Last Supper. It is the institution of the Eucharist. As Jesus gives His life to us, we are called to do as He did, "wash one another's feet." We are called to become what we receive at the altar and live out the gift of the Eucharist, to get up from the table and go forth.

It is a gift that we must first receive. St. Peter, in first refusing to allow Jesus to wash his feet, is symbolically refusing the gift. Jesus reminds him that if he does not receive the gift, if he does not allow Jesus to wash away his sins, if he does not allow Jesus to love him, then he will have no inheritance with Him. God is love. God is the source of love. We cannot give what we have not received. We must allow Jesus to wash our feet before we can wash others.

Reflection

On the evening of Holy Thursday, we celebrate the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus at the Last Supper. Many would call this the first Eucharist of the Church. I would argue that the Church was born from the side of Christ pierced by the lance on Good Friday. Therefore, I would contend that the First Eucharist of the Church occurred on the road to Emmaus that first Easter Sunday.

The Eucharist fulfills the promise of God to share His life with us, to give us His Only Son as proclaimed in John 3:16: "For God so love the world that He gave His only Son..." Out of love God choses to share His life with us. The Eucharist is the gift of, the sharing of, His divine life. It is Jesus, body, blood, soul, and divinity on the altar, in our hands, on our lips and in our hearts. At the Last Supper Jesus spoke of His indwelling, abiding presence. That gift is fulfilled in many ways but in a most real and substantial way in the Eucharist.

To begin to understand the gift of the Eucharist it is imperative to reflect on the power of God's word. In the beginning God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God spoke and everything came into being from nothing. Throughout Sacred Scripture we see the power of God's word to effect change. When time was right the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. When Jesus spoke, things happened. When he said, "Little girl arise," the little girl rose for the dead. When He said, "Lazareth come out," the young man who had been dead and buried for four days walked out of the tomb. When Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Son of God, through whom everything came into being, takes the bread and says, "This is My Body," the bread becomes His Body. When Jesus takes the chalice filled with wine and water and says, "This is My Blood," then the wine and the water become His Blood. When Jesus said to the apostles, "Do this in remembrance of Me," He is commanding and in fact ordaining them and empowering them to do the same.

To aide our understanding of the Eucharist it is also important to understand the Jewish connotation of remembrance. It is much more profound than what the English word remembrance captures. The Jewish understanding is better articulated by the underlying Greek word *anamnesis*. *Anamnesis* means to make present again what once was. For example, when the Jews celebrate Passover, they reenact the original experience. They dress for the occasion with walking stick in hand. They make present again the saving act of God such that the those who were not there can experience it. Every time we gather around the altar to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we make present again the Last Supper so that we may partake of the one bread and the one chalice. We make present again the Sacrifice of Calvary and we are there at the foot of the Cross. The blood and the water that flowed from the pierced side of Christ flows over us to wash us clean in the blood of the Lamb.

The Last Supper and the Cross of Calvary cannot be separated, they are one. In the Mass both are present simultaneously. Before the Pascal Mystery of Jesus there were multiple sacrifices offered every day. Now there is one sacrifice to end all sacrifices. At every Mass we make present again the Last Supper and the one sacrifice of Calvary.

The Second Vatican Council called the Eucharist, "The Source and Summit of our Faith." It is the source of our faith in that it is God sharing His divine life with us. He is the source of all that is and ever will be. God is the giver and sustainer of life. Out of love God choses to share His life with us. The real and substantial presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is the fulfillment of His promise of His indwelling presence and is therefore the summit of our Faith, the gift of eternal life.

In Christ,



Personal Witness

I was blessed as a child to be immersed in a very devout Catholic family. When I say that I am talking about parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc. Our family of six children took up an entire pew in church, but then there were grandparents and several pews of aunts and uncles and cousins that took up several additional pews. There is a popular expression that states, "Faith is caught, not taught." I caught my faith as a child. I memorized the Baltimore Catechism, but I don't know how much I understood. Whereas my faith was passed on to me by the entirety of my extended family, my faith was caught from my grandfather. Being his first and favorite grandson we were particularly close. Seeing his faith in his face and in his words and in his actions was contagious. His reverence and piety at the celebration of Holy Mass left me with little doubt as to the real and substantial presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

He and grandma owned a small country general merchandise store. For many years grandpa drove the school bus for the rural grammar school that we attended. After the morning run, he would serve the 8 a.m. daily Mass at the Catholic Church about a block from the school. Then he would work the store until the after-school bus route.

On Saturday mornings during the school year, I would attend catechism class at school. It was taught by a group of devout sisters from a neighboring town. I recall memorizing the Baltimore Catechism. My book was filled with stars signifying my accomplishments. I was able to memorize well, but I understood very little. Nonetheless, I learned that God loved me and that He made me to love and serve Him in this life and be with Him forever in the next. Intellectually I understood that much. When I received my First Communion, I had no doubt that it was Jesus that I was receiving.

After catechism class I would walk over to my grandparent's store about two blocks down the road. My job was to help stock the shelves. As I was doing that grandpa was filling boxes with groceries to be delivered. He would fill the back seat and the trunk of his big Buick and then we would be off delivering groceries. Our travels took us down some very rough backroads in a very rural area. On more than one occasion we got the Buick stuck on the muddy roads. Some of the homes that we visited were old trailers and dilapidated old houses. I found out later in life, after grandpa had passed away, that he most often did not charge for the groceries that he delivered. Often, he would tell them that he would send them the bill, but never did. My grandmother who was the bookkeeper had a difficult time balancing the books.

Grandpa died on Good Friday, 1975. At his wake and funeral, the following week, I was overwhelmed by people who came up to me and shared stories about how grandpa had helped them out. I heard stories of fathers who were temporarily unemployed for a variety of reasons, some who were suffering from injury or chronic illness, families who were just down and out and grandpa helped them through a dark and difficult time. At his funeral there were people standing in the isles of church and in the vestibule. It was a testament to how many lives he had touched. I learned more about God from my grandpa than all those years of catechism class, Catholic high school, and 5 years of seminary training. He lived the gospel. For him the Eucharist was a verb. He lived the Eucharist with his life, he put on the heart and mind of Jesus, he put a towel around his waist and washed some feet. From him I caught my faith and I am eternally grateful. Thanks gramps!

In Christ,

